EC&I 809 – Reading Response #5 (Chapters 7, 8, & 9)

Nicole Lipinski

**What is the Expertise-oriented evaluation approach?**

* Oldest and most widely used and depends primarily on subjective, professional expertise (one expert or a panel) to judge an institution, program, product or activity

**Categories, Developers and their contributions**

* Formal Professional Review Systems – has existing structure, published standards for use in reviews, a specific schedule, opinions of several experts, impact on the status of what was reviewed
  + Accreditation – process whereby an organization grants approval of institutions (ex. schools, hospitals)
  + Current systems depend on the assumption that only members of a profession are qualified to judge the activities of their peers
* Informal Professional Review Systems – has existing structure, a set of procedural guidelines, and use of multiple reviewers but lack the formal review system’s published standards or specific review schedule
  + Ex. Graduate student’s supervisory committee
* Ad Hoc Panel Reviews – do not have existing structure, published standards or specified schedules, do not incorporate opinions of multiple experts
  + Blue-Ribbon Panels – Ex. National Commission on Excellence in Education (early 1980’s)
  + Typically review a particular situation, document observations and make recommendations for action
  + Recommendations may be ignored because there is often no formalized body in charge to follow up on their advice
* Ad Hoc Individual Reviews – do not have existing structure, published standards, specified schedules or opinions of multiple experts – object of evaluation is only sometimes affected by the results
* Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism – involve the description, interpretation and evaluation in order to expand one’s perception rather than reaching a consensus among experts
  + Connoisseurship– awareness of qualities and relationships
  + Criticism – disclosure of the qualities that the connoisseurship perceives

**What are some strengths and limitations of the expertise-oriented evaluation approach?**

* Emphasized the central role of expert judgment and human wisdom in the evaluation process
* Can foster excellence and institutional improvement
* Modest cost, however multiple reviews can boost costs
* Most accreditation processes have a self-study phase
* Includes both formative and summative evaluation
* Public concerns over credibility
* Question of whether another expert or panel would arrive at the same judgments and recommendations

**What is the Participant-Oriented Evaluation Approach?**

* Evaluators work to portray the multiple needs, values, and perspectives of program stakeholders and make judgments about the worth of the program being evaluated
* Evaluations often depend on inductive reasoning, use multiple data sources, do not follow a standard plan and describe multiple realities (not just one)

**Developers and contributions**

* Stake’s Countenance Framework – structure gives evaluators a conceptual framework for thinking through the data needs of a complete evaluation
  + asserted evaluation should be descriptive and judgments are made by applying standards to descriptive data
* Responsive Evaluation – central focus is in addressing the concerns and issues of the stakeholder audience
  + Interact continuously with members of various stakeholder groups to ascertain what information they desire and the manner in which they prefer to receive the information
  + Recommendations are more likely to be conditional with judgments about what is the “best” or “preferred” course of action
* Naturalistic Evaluation – goal is to describe a program fully while taking into account the different value perspectives of its stakeholders
  + the evaluator is placed in the role of “learner” and those being studied in the evaluation as “teachers”
  + credibility is obtained by corroboration of data through cross-checking and triangulation
* Participatory Evaluation – evaluators work in partnership with practitioners and aim at providing community input
  + Best suited for formative evaluations that help to inform and improve program implementation
* Empowerment Evaluation – evaluators become advocates for societies’ disenfranchised and voiceless minorities
  + Must be used carefully and thoughtfully to be effective

**What are some strengths and limitations of the participant-oriented evaluation approach?**

* Can and do use both qualitative and quantitative methods
* Directs the attention to the needs for whom the evaluation is being done
* Encouragement of multiple data-collection techniques
* Provides persuasive information that is credible to audiences
* Establishes dialogue with and empowers stakeholders
* Tendency to minimize the importance of instrumentation and group data
* Costly – can be labor intensive
* Conclusions may not be extended beyond the cases examined

**What are some advantages or problems with alternative evaluation approaches?**

* Problems with synthesis: approaches are based on widely divergent philosophical assumptions and integrating would be impossible, could bring premature closure to expansion and refinement within the field, contexts are different and as such their frameworks offer a richness of perspectives
* Different perspectives on evaluation can be applied to some, but not all, evaluation situations
* Evaluators may determine which approach(es) to employ in a given situation based on philosophical, methodological and client preferences rather than scientific inquiry or empirical testing
* Value of alternative approaches: capacity to help us think, present and provoke new ideas and techniques, serve as mental checklists of things to consider or remember
* Eclectic Uses -Use whichever approach is appropriate to the situation and one is free to choose the best from diverse sources, systems or styles

**Part II – Reflection**

Being very new to many of the concepts and ideas being presented in this course, I found it ironic that the author on page 159 mimics my thoughts – “the reader might be feeling challenged to assimilate all of it.” I am finding it interesting to read about all of the various approaches to program evaluation and slowly the pieces of the puzzle are starting to come together. One of the most beneficial parts to this reading section was table 9.1 (pages 160-162). To see the comparative analysis done for each of the five approaches I was able to gain a more thorough idea of the similarities and differences between them. This has helped clarify for me instances where these approaches best fit.

Two questions that were raised in the reading were: “If there is no empirical basis for deciding which to follow when designing and conducting a particular evaluation, then of what worth are they?” (pg.158) and “How will one know which approach is best for a given situation?” (pg. 156) I think that these are cornerstones for an evaluator. I see the role of an evaluator a complex one, where they are to satisfy the needs and concerns of all parties involved while producing data that is both credible and applicable for program improvements.

While each approach has both its strengths and limitations, I think this aspect is what struck me about responsive evaluation. Continuous interaction with members of various stakeholder groups to gather what information they desire and the manner in which they prefer to receive the information seems like a perfect fit. As a teacher, various evaluations regarding continuation of course offerings and school structure have taken place. Personally, I have felt more at ease when I have been involved in the process or at least have been informed of the process. This may be different in other occupations, but any changes to our programming or structure have a direct impact on my role. As such, to have the feeling that the impact(s) on the persons involved is being considered definitely reduces anxiety and this may not be the case in a management-oriented approach.

Chapter nine had a very big impact on me. It has started to answer some of the questions I have had about program evaluations and how what I have seen hasn’t necessarily always fit one structure, but rather is blurred often between different approaches. I can understand why the author states that eclecticism is common in education. Evaluations become more useful when they are able to employ various strategies and approaches. The role of the evaluator and their willingness to be flexible in the approach become paramount to attaining the desired outcome for management or stakeholders of any given program.